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Viewing cable 09DHAHRAN40, SAUDI HEZBOLLAH LEADER WARNS OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09DHAHRAN40**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DHAHRAN40	2009-03-22 08:19	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Consulate Dhahran

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/22/116306/wikileaks-saudi-crackdown-on-shiites.html>

VZCZCXRO6378
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHDH #0040/01 0810819
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 220819Z MAR 09
FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0046
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0003
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN 0061

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAHRAN 000040

NOFORN
SIPDIS

PASS TO NEA/ARP JOSHUA HARRIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/22/2019
TAGS: [SA](#) [LE](#) [IR](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI HEZBOLLAH LEADER WARNS OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

REF: 06 RIYADH 4914, 09 RIYADH 1868, 08 RIYADH 270, 09 DHAHRAN 8, 08 RIYADH 1321, 09 RIYADH 346, 09 DHAHRAN 14
DHAHRAN 00000040 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Julie Stineheart, Acting Consul General, EXEC,
DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)
[1](#)1. (C/NF) Key Points:

-- XXXXXXXXXXXX (strictly protect), a popular Shi'a cleric and alleged leader of Saudi Hezbollah, met with PolOff after years of refusing to meet with USG officials (ref A).

-- XXXXXXXXXXXX declared that the USG could persuade the SAG to adopt serious reforms for religious freedom and human rights, but chooses not to and is therefore an "enemy" of the Saudi Shi'a.

-- XXXXXXXXXXXX believes that the SAG must take substantive and public steps toward fostering religious and national unity among Saudi citizens.

-- Echoing other Shi'a leaders, XXXXXXXXXXXX warned that sectarian violence may erupt if the SAG does not address Shi'a concerns and that it will be worse than Iraq.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Comment:

-- XXXXXXXXXXXX's warning of possible sectarian violence echoes the

sentiments of a diverse set of sections of the Shi'a community. On December 21, a group of young Shi'a voiced their dissatisfaction with the SAG, making no attempt to hide three rifles and a picture of Hassan Nasrallah on display in the room (ref B). On February 7, XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), an influential Shi'a political activist, warned of an increasingly "frustrated and impatient" Shi'a youth (ref C). In late February, XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), an elected municipal council member, said that "the root for trouble" is present in the Shi'a community and feared sectarian violence (ref D). In early March, XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), a vocal Saudi human rights activist, raised fears of the Shi'a youth resorting to violence unless the SAG takes action (ref D). Most recently, XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), a well-respected manager and journalist XXXXXXXXXXXX, communicated similar concerns about sectarian tensions escalating into violence.

End key points and comment.

13. (C/NF) A LONG TIME COMING. XXXXXXXXXXXX, a vocal Saudi human rights activist, facilitated a meeting with XXXXXXXXXXXX upon PolOff's request. Past attempts by Dhahran PolOffs to meet with XXXXXXXXXXXX were unsuccessful, with the sheikh unwilling to risk "losing the respect of people on the street" by meeting with USG officials (ref A). The meeting took place in the late evening of March 7 at XXXXXXXXXXXX's home in Dammam, and was attended by the sheikh's three adolescent sons, nephew, and his older brother, XXXXXXXXXXXX, who acted as interpreter when necessary. No other Consulate personnel were present. (Comment: Post is not entirely certain why XXXXXXXXXXXX suddenly agreed to meet with a USG official. One possibility is that the intermediary, XXXXXXXXXXXX, as a trusted and respected friend, persuaded XXXXXXXXXXXX to meet with PolOff. Another possibility is that XXXXXXXXXXXX truly believes that sectarian violence is imminent and views the USG as the only entity able to pressure the SAG into taking quick and bold action to prevent hostility. End comment.)

14. (C/NF) A SOFT HARDLINER. Many respected Shi'a contacts have described XXXXXXXXXXXX as an outspoken, somewhat radical Shi'a religious leader with a large and diverse following. XXXXXXXXXXXX wears a black turban and goes by the title "Sayyid" as opposed to "Sheikh," indicating that he is a direct descendant of Prophet Mohammed. Though many Shi'a religious leaders criticized this bold claim, he continues to maintain a large and loyal following. Though previous reporting (refs A, E) suggests that XXXXXXXXXXXX is a leadership figure in Saudi Hezbollah, several Shi'a contacts play down these claims and believe that he has become more moderate, citing his participation in the National Dialogue with King Abdullah in 2005. (Note: Most credible contacts believe that Saudi Hezbollah is a largely inactive movement with minimal foreign contact and limited organizational capacity. End note.)

15. (C/NF) AMERICA IS THE ENEMY. During the two-hour long meeting, XXXXXXXXXXXX remained cordial but strongly critical of the USG and the SAG. He told PolOff that the Saudi Shi'a have three enemies: the Wahabbis, the royal family, and the USG. He explained that the Al Saud family has failed to improve the religious freedom and basic rights of Shi'a citizens, and continue to placate the intolerant views of the Wahabbi (Sunni) extremists. Moreover, he continued, the USG supports the SAG without question and has not pressured the government to improve the situation of the Shi'a. Due to its inaction, XXXXXXXXXXXX views the USG as an accomplice to the SAG's discrimination of the Shi'a. He dismissed PolOff's citation of the USG's annual Human Rights and International Religious Freedom reports by saying that the SAG has taken no action based on those reports. XXXXXXXXXXXX distinguished between the USG and the general U.S. population, noting that he did not view the latter as an enemy and on the contrary enjoyed his experience in the U.S. in the 1990s. (Note: He did not elaborate on his visit to the U.S. End note.)

16. (C/NF) THE SAG HAS NOT DONE ENOUGH. XXXXXXXXXXXX declared with frustration that the Shi'a would not wait any more for the SAG to bring about real change. He explained that the Medina incident (ref F) is just the latest example of Saudi discrimination of the Shi'a. He was particularly concerned with the random stabbing of a Shi'a sheikh by Wahabbi extremists in Medina (ref D) and its implications for his community's basic sense of security. XXXXXXXXXXXX noted that it has been nearly four years since he participated in the National Dialogue with King Abdullah and he still has not seen any results. He also noted that the municipal council elections have provided few benefits, citing the minimal authority that the elected officials hold. He has dismissed symbolic gestures such as King Abdullah's recent meeting with Shi'a leaders as "not enough" (ref G).

17. (C/NF) PROUD TO BE SAUDI. Despite his overt criticism of the SAG and the royal family, on several occasions XXXXXXXXXXXX noted his desire for national unity among his countrymen. He told PolOff that it should be illegal for one Saudi to call another "Shi'a" or "Sunni." He said, "we are all Saudis" and should not differentiate, with all being treated as equal citizens.

18. (C/NF) IRAN, HEZBOLLAH. XXXXXXXXXXXX accused the USG of having "double standards" by its support of Israel, and its criticism of Iran and Hezbollah. When PolOff asked him a follow up question specifically on Iran, XXXXXXXXXXXX carefully side-stepped it. (Comment: The measured and politically savvy XXXXXXXXXXXX was deliberate in painting a blurry picture of his relationship to and views on Iran and Hezbollah. However, a few days later XXXXXXXXXXXX gave an interview on Al-Manaar TV, a satellite station

viewed by the USG as a propaganda arm of Hezbollah. End comment.)

19. (C/NF) ANOTHER WARNING ABOUT SECTARIAN VIOLENCE. Echoing several other mainstream Shi'a leadership figures, XXXXXXXXXXXX warned PolOff, "Don't be surprised if it comes to violence." He went on to say that the violence would be "double" of that in Iraq and that the Shi'a would be "slaughtered" by the SAG. He then said that he recently called on his congregation at last Friday's prayers to not demonstrate in the streets, for which he received criticism from some of his followers. He also told PolOff that it is not only the Saudi youth that are growing frustrated, but also "regular people on the street."

10. (C/NF) WHAT THE SAG NEEDS TO DO. XXXXXXXXXXXX repeated several times the need for the SAG to publicly guarantee religious freedoms and equal treatment of all Saudi citizens, while justly punishing those who violate these rights. XXXXXXXXXXXX did not lay out specific steps the SAG must take in order to avoid conflict. However, he noted some examples of lingering problems that the SAG alone can address: the routine closure of Shi'a mosques and husseiniyyas in Dammam, Khobar, and al-Ahsa; the religious police regularly harassing Shi'a; random arrests of Shi'a without due process; no Shi'a graveyards in Dammam and Khobar; and under-representation in government, religious, and education institutions.
STINEHART